

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF TRENDS IN  
WORLD POPULATION, FOOD PRODUCTION, AND CLIMATE

## KEY JUDGMENTS

Trying to provide adequate world food supplies will become a problem of over-riding priority in the years and decades immediately ahead -- and a key role in any successful effort must fall to the US. Even in the most favorable circumstances predictable, with increased devotion of scarce resources and technical expertise, the outcome will be doubtful; in the event of adverse changes in climate, the outcome can only be grave.

The momentum of world population growth, especially in the less developed countries (LDCs), is such that even strong measures taken now to reduce fertility would not stop rapid growth for decades. Thus, most LDCs must cope with the needs of much larger populations or face the political and other consequences of rising death rates.

Demand for food rises inexorably with the growth of population and of affluence. Increases in supply are less certain. Man's age-old concerns about the adequacy of food supplies have resumed with particular urgency since the crop-failures of 1972.

The rich countries need have no fear of hunger, though the relative price of food will probably rise at times.

The poor, food-deficit LDCs must produce most of the additional food they will need to support their

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growing populations. They cannot afford to import it, nor is it likely they can count on getting enough aid from the food-exporting countries. They face serious political, economic, and cultural obstacles to raising output, however, and are in for considerable strain at the least, and probably for periods of famine.

The US now provides nearly three-fourths of the world's net grain exports and its role is almost certain to grow over the next several decades. The world's increasing dependence on American surpluses portends an increase in US power and influence, especially vis-a-vis the food-deficit poor countries. Indeed, in times of shortage, the US will face difficult choices about how to allocate its surplus between affluent purchasers and the hungry world.

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The implications for the world food situation and for US interests would be considerably greater if climatologists who believe a cooling trend is underway prove to be right.

If the trend continues for several decades there would almost certainly be an absolute shortage of food. The high-latitude areas, including the USSR and north China, would experience shorter growing seasons and a drop in output. The monsoon-fed lands in Asia and Africa would also be adversely affected.

US production would probably not be hurt much. As custodian of the bulk of the

world's exportable grain, the US might regain the primacy in world affairs it held in the immediate post-World War II era.

In the worst case, *if* climate change caused grave shortages of food despite US exports, the potential risks to the US would also rise. There would be increasingly desperate attempts on the part of powerful but hungry nations to get grain any way they could. Massive migrations, sometimes backed by force, would become a live issue and political and economic instability would be widespread.

In the poor and powerless areas, population would have to drop to levels that could be supported. The population "problem" would have solved itself in the most unpleasant fashion.